

Portraits & Identity

Key Stage 4 & 5

This learning resource is designed to help you understand portraits and create your own responses. Based on portraits that you might see on display if you visited Chatsworth, you will explore photomontage techniques to express your identity. As with all of our resources, you do not need to start on page one and complete the full resource. Pick and choose what you want to complete.

What you will do: You will look at key characteristics of portraits by artists and carry out a series of studies of yourself to design a series of portraits representing different aspects of your identity. This is a fun way to develop your understanding of portraits.

What you will use: If you want to try making a self-portrait, all you need is a mirror. If you want to portray someone else, they will need to be willing to sit still! We have included some examples of portraits by artists in the activity sheet to help get you thinking.

What you will need: A range of drawing materials, sharp scissors, glue, sticky tape, double sided tape, old magazines or newspapers, found images or photocopies, prints or photographs of faces.

Learning Outcomes You will:

- Extend your range of image-making skills and techniques
- Be able to identify and categorise portraiture
- Develop specialist written and spoken language skills to describe portraits and self-portraits

Portraits & Identity Activity 1

First, let's understand what a portrait is

Can you describe what you think a portrait is in the space below?

Portraits are artistic representations of people (in portraits, people are referred to as 'sitters' whether they are sitting down or standing up). Portraits work in different ways. Here are some pointers:

- A portrait can capture a physical likeness or quality of a person and/or their personality, social status, job, age and gender
- An artist making portraits can present clues about their sitter through pose and facial expression, use of colour and space, or objects within the image
- Sometimes portrait artists flatter their sitters (often described as *idealising*), or represent them as a well-known historical figure or as a goddess or god (this is known as *allegory*)
- Objects are often intended to be symbolic when included within a portrait.
- A portrait is rarely just a likeness of a person

Let's look at a variety of portraits

Using the key points on the previous page, explore the portraits below and try to arrange them into the following categories: We've included some support information at the end of this resource to help you understand the descriptions

◆Likeness ◆Idealised ◆Symbolic ◆Allegorical ◆Abstract



Next, choose two portraits, each from a different category, and try the following:

1. Identify the similarities – what do they have in common?
2. Describe how they are entirely different from each other

Clue: Think about the composition, level of detail, inclusion of objects, character, status and pose

Use this space to make some notes

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Portraits & Identity Activity 2

Now you are going to explore the process of photomontage to create a series of self-portraits.

Photomontage is a technique where different photographic images combine to construct a new image. This technique grew in popularity among artists in the 20th century. Look up the following artists, well known for photomontage portraiture. You may want to research them further for more ideas and inspiration.

[Hannah Hoch](#)

[Henri Matisse](#)

[Hollie Chastain](#)

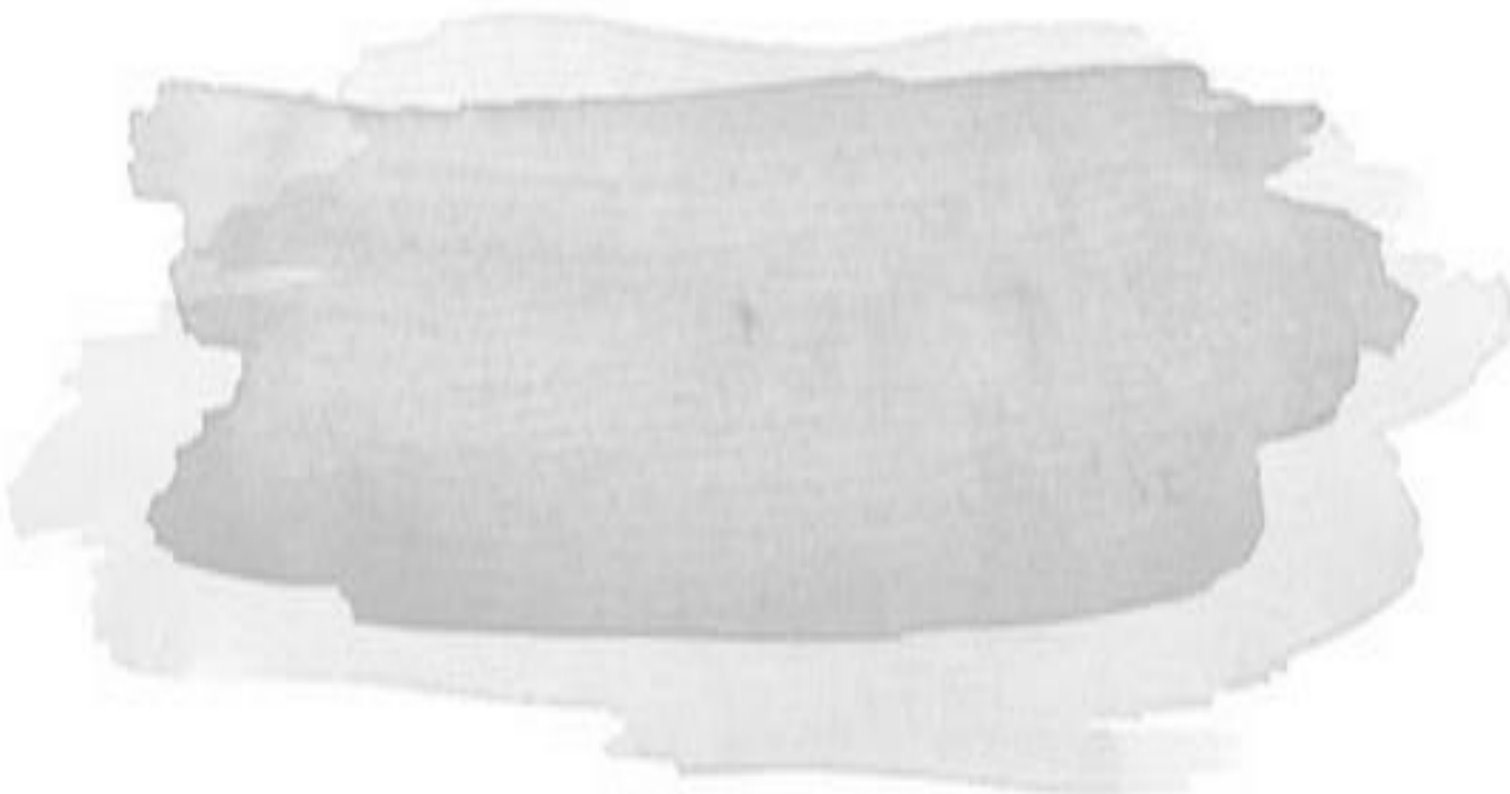
[Joe Webb](#)

Now it's time to get creative. Grab your scissors, glue, and a selection of found images. You are going to montage different features of your face from these found images. You will need a separate sheet of paper for this.

Is there a striking feature that makes you individual or different? Can you exaggerate it? Does a feature resemble a fruit or animal that you could use instead? The artist [Arcimboldi](#) is famous for using organic objects in his portraits.

Can you think of a symbolic or idealised way to represent yourself? What objects would you associate with who you are? Perhaps you play a musical instrument, or are really into a particular sport. This might influence how you choose to represent yourself.

Use this space for you to write or draw some initial ideas



Portraiture information

Use the definitions below to help you work out what kind of portraits you are studying in Activity 1 – and perhaps also to work out what kind of portrait you might want to create. We have also included some more detail about the examples we've shared with you in activity 1.

Abstract: A portrait can be described as 'abstract' where it is not instantly recognisable as a physical likeness of a person. Abstraction usually deals with the realm of ideas, not material reality. Abstract portraiture might substitute an object for a person (Van Gogh's Chair is a good example of this). Or, it might be possible to tell that you are looking at a face – Picasso's cubist portraits for example – but not an instantly recognisable one!

Allegorical: Allegorical portraiture presents the 'sitter' as a character from Greco-Roman mythology or a figure from history. The viewer of the portrait is invited to identify the personal qualities of the 'sitter' with that of the character or figure (for example, a female sitter represented as the goddess of love Aphrodite/Venus might be assumed to be beautiful in reality).

Idealised: Idealised portraits represent a recognisable individual with certain aspects of their physiognomy flattered (a little like modern-day airbrushing in magazine photo shoots). A nose might be straightened, a waistline diminished).

Realistic (instead of likeness): The origins of realism in portraits extends back to ancient Rome, when artists were noted for their 'warts and all' approach to representing individuals on coins, in sculpture and in fresco and painting.

symbolic Regardless of these above mentioned categories, portraits operate on a symbolic level. Whether idealised or realistic, the objects surrounding a sitter, often function as extensions of their status, personality or interests.

Portraits from the Devonshire Collections – usually seen on a visit to Chatsworth



Portrait of the Chatsworth Brewer and Cellarman by William Baker, 1835. Oil on canvas.

Edmund Marsden is shown full-length, surrounded by the tools of his trade. This portrait was presented to him, by his colleagues, on his retirement. When this was painted – almost two hundred years ago – it was more common for portraits to be made of people from higher social classes.



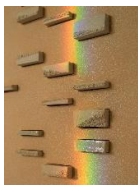
Portrait of Georgiana Spencer, Duchess of Devonshire as Diana by Maria Cosway, 1781-1782. Oil on canvas.

Georgiana floats towards us, nestled in the crescent curve of the clouds. Her dress is modelled on ancient Greek fashion and the crescent moon in her headband most likely refers to the Goddess Diana; goddess of the hunt, the moon, and chastity, among other things.



Portrait of Ladies Georgiana and Harriet Cavendish, daughters of the 5th Duke of Devonshire, around 1850. Watercolour on ivory. British School, after Richard Cosway.

Portrait miniatures – so called due to their small size – were created for a number of reasons. Miniatures of children sometimes marked the continuation of a family line however they might just as easily function as a precious and intimate record of loved ones in their infancy.



The North Sketch Sequence by Jacob van der Beugel, 2010-2014. Site-specific ceramic installation.

Ceramic blocks represent the DNA profiles of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and their son and his wife, Lord and Lady Burlington. These profiles are arranged on either side of a central sequence representing the DNA of 'everyman'. They are portraits, but may not be as visibly obvious!



Portrait of William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire by Anton von Maron, oil on canvas.

At some point after the completion of this portrait, the Duke's face was repainted at the request of Lady Elizabeth Foster. She preferred the way another artist, Sir Joshua Reynolds, had captured the Duke in a portrait which hung at Althorp, the home of the family of the Duke's wife.



Portrait bust of Elisabeth Frink by Angela Conner, 1993, Bronze.

This is a portrait of one artist by another. Conner has departed from her usual smooth finish, preferring here to use her chosen medium – bronze – to not only depict Frink but also to represent Frink's artistic style.



Portrait of William Cavendish, 2nd Duke of Devonshire by Charles Jervas, between 1710 and 1719. Oil on canvas

In this portrait, the 2nd Duke is surrounded by possessions that add meaning to the portrait. He wears the star and sash of the order of the garter, holds a coin from this collection of coins and gems and is seated beside his coin and gem cabinet.



A group portrait of Christian Bruce, Countess of Devonshire, with her sons, William, 3rd Earl of Devonshire, Charles, and her daughter, Anne, early 1630s. Oil on canvas

On the one hand a family portrait and on the other, every pose, hand gesture, costume and accessory could add meaning to a dynastic group picture.

Here are the curriculum links these activities cover:

Art & Design	English	PSHE
Evaluate and analyse creative works using the language of art, craft and design	Develop skills in critical thinking and voicing opinions in writing and within small and larger groups	Build self- esteem by sharing opinions and explaining views on the artwork
To use a range of techniques to record observations as a basis for exploring ideas, whilst using a range of techniques and different media	Listening to and building on the contributions of others, asking questions to clarify and inform, and challenging courteously when necessary	Develop critical thinking skills
Extend and develop drawing techniques and sculpture making skills using a range of techniques and media		Develop self-confidence in the creative process for individual attainment
Know about great artists, craft makers and designers, and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms (KS3)		